DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 200 234 IR 009 274

TITLE	Special Purpose Dissemination Grant. Final Report.
INSTITUTION	Arkansas State Dept. of Education, Little Rock.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Sep 80
GRANT	NIE-G-78-0010
NOTE	14p.
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Educational Resources; Federal Aid; *Information Dissemination; Information Needs; Information Services; Needs Assessment; *School Districts; School Surveys; State Departments of Education; *State Programs
IDENTIFIERS	*Arkansas; *State Dissemination Grants Program

ABSTRACT

This report describes the activities and accomplishments resulting from a federal dissemination grant awarded to the Arkansas State Department of Education. The state dissemination project was conducted to make school personnel aware of dissemination activities and to assess the needs of school district personnel and state agency personnel in the area of educational information. The needs assessment study is detailed, and tables display data gathered in a sampling of school districts. Results of the study are summarized. (FM)

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ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

SPECIAL PURPOSE DISSEMINATION GRANT

(NIE-G-78-0010)

National Institute of Education

FOR

FINAL REPORT

September 1980

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Director

IR009274

INDEX

1. ABSTRACT i

2. Activities/Accomplishments.....1

3. The Needs Assessment. 3

4. Selecting Sample School District Personnel.....4

5. Table I - School Districts in Sample.....6

6. Table II - School District Personnel Sample by Region/School Size.....7

7. Results of Assessment Studies.....8

8. Summary.....10

ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

SPECIAL PURPOSE GRANT
National Institute of Education

During the operation of the Special Purpose dissemination grant, many activities were conducted to make school personnel aware of dissemination activities and to assess the needs of LEA personnel and State Department of Education personnel in the area of educational information. The following statements summarize the major activities and accomplishments.

1) A Clearinghouse Committee on dissemination was organized within the State Department of Education. This committee involved personnel directly concerned with dissemination and represented the major divisions within the Department.

2) A statewide Advisory Committee was organized and included representatives from local school districts and universities.

3) The two committees were involved in various training activities conducted and served as an advisory committee on the needs assessment studies.

4) The Advisory and Clearinghouse Committee members visited dissemination projects operating in various State Departments of Education. The State Departments of Kansas, South Carolina, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Kentucky and Texas were visited by members of the Clearinghouse and Advisory Committees. The Project Director, on his return from South Carolina, also visited the Georgia Department of Education. These states, because of their Capacity Building projects, were visited in order to see what kinds of dissemination systems were in place and to ascertain the effectiveness of these dissemination systems; also, to see what procedures these states were following which might

be appropriate for Arkansas. The visitations helped the Advisory Committee members become more familiar with the dissemination process.

5) Three two-day workshops were held for the purpose of familiarizing the Advisory Committee members, State Department personnel, and local education agencies' personnel with certain concepts of dissemination. The first workshop was conducted on March 16-17, 1978, by Dr. Philip K. Piele, Director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, on the ERIC System.

The second workshop was conducted on April 13 and 14, 1978, by Doctors Gene Hall and Susan Loucks of the University of Texas Research and Development Center, on the Concerns-Based Adoption Model.

The third workshop, August 24-25, 1978, was conducted by Dr. David Crandall, Director of the NETWORK, on Linking Agents.

At the end of each workshop, participants were given the opportunity to evaluate the workshop. According to the evaluations, all three of the workshops were successful.

6) Perhaps the highlights of the project year have been the two needs assessment studies conducted with local education agencies' personnel and State Department personnel. In order to develop the two survey instruments (one for LEA people and one for SEA personnel) a review was made of survey forms developed by other State Departments of Education for this purpose. With the assistance of the Advisory and Clearinghouse Committees, the literature was researched and two survey instruments were developed and used in the needs assessment surveys.

Forty-one school districts were selected on a random basis to participate in the survey. Four-hundred-seventeen (417) persons (superintendents, principals, teachers, counselors and librarians) from these 41 districts were

selected randomly to respond to the instrument.

The Department of Education's professional staff (168) was selected to respond to the SEA instrument.

The Needs Assessment

From funds provided in the Special Purpose grant, two needs assessment studies were conducted. One study assessed the educational information needs of school district personnel, and the second study assessed the dissemination needs of personnel in the State Education Agency. Procedures used in conducting these studies are outlined below.

Procedures used in assessing the educational information needs of school district personnel were to:

(a) develop an assessment instrument;

(b) select a sample of school district personnel to complete the assessment instrument;

(c) administer the assessment instrument to personnel in the sample school districts;

(d) score the completed instruments;

(e) analyze the data.

A consultant firm was used in conducting the needs assessment study.

Developing an Assessment Instrument

The initial step in developing an instrument to assess the educational information needs of Arkansas school personnel was to conduct an ERIC search to find out what was available. From this search several different types of assessment instruments were located. A questionnaire used in the Wisconsin Dissemination Project seemed to be an instrument that could be adapted and used. The consultant firm adapted the questionnaire and presented it to the project

advisory committee for their critique. The questionnaire was then revised in accordance with the advisory committee's suggestions. The revised questionnaire was field tested by asking school personnel who were not in the sample to complete the questionnaire and note unclear terms or statements and indicate any problems they had in completing the questionnaire. After the field test, the questionnaire was revised and finalized.

Selecting Sample School District Personnel to Complete the Assessment Instrument

It was not feasible to administer the assessment questionnaire to all school personnel in the State, so a sampling procedure was used. It was felt that using a stratified random method would produce the best representative sample. The two stratification factors that seemed most important to consider were geographical region of the State and size of school district.

The State was divided into three areas according to geographical location: Mountains (Region I), Delta (Region II), and the Plains area (Region III). Within each geographical area schools were divided according to size: small (less than 500 enrollment), medium (500 to 1500 enrollment), and large (over 1500 enrollment). This stratification plan produced a total of nine different cells from which to choose a sample. School districts were numbered within each cell. A ten percent sample of school districts was selected from each cell, using a table of random numbers. For example, if there were a total of 100 small school districts in Region I, ten numbers between 1-100 were selected from a table of random numbers. The ten school districts whose numbers corresponded to the selected numbers were included in the sample. This same procedure was used for the remaining eight cells.

Within each school district a twenty percent sample of school personnel was randomly selected. This was accomplished by selecting every fifth person

from a list of faculty members (teachers and other certified personnel) in each of the sample school districts. A list of these faculty members in the sample was sent to their respective school with a request that these individuals complete the survey form. If the faculty member was not currently employed, the person filling that position was asked to complete it instead.

In addition to the school districts selected by the random selection technique, the assessment questionnaire was also submitted to a sample group of teachers and administrators in the Little Rock School District. This decision was made because of the uniqueness and the size of the Little Rock School District when compared with other school districts throughout the State. In selecting the sample group of school personnel to take the questionnaire in the Little Rock School District, a procedure similar to the one used on the statewide sample was followed. A ten percent sample of the school buildings was selected, and a twenty percent sample of personnel within each of the chosen buildings was asked to complete the assessment questionnaire. The following map shows a breakdown of the geographical regions used in the State. Table 2 contains a list of the sample school districts.

Table 1: SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN SAMPLE

Region I (Mountain)	Region II (Delta)	Region III (Plains)
Small	**Small**	**Small**
1. Lynn	1. Tyronza	1. Bodcaw
2. Lafe	2. Wheatley	2. Woodlawn
3. Strawberry	3. Collins	3. Willisville
4. Mt. Pleasant		4. Winthrop
5. Oden	**Medium**	5. Blevens
6. Kensett		6. Mt. Holly
7. Hartford	1. Brookland	
8. Lead Hill	2. Dermott	**Medium**
9. Western Grove	3. Star City	
	4. Valley View	1. Sparkman
Medium		2. Rison
	Large	3. Bearden
1. Dover		4. Prescott
2. Cedarville	1. Craighead	
3. Rector	2. Cross	**Large**
4. Maynard		
5. Salem		1. Magnolia
6. Bald Knob		2. Ashdown
		3. Malvern
Large		4. Little Rock
1. Dardanelle		
2. Greene Co. Tech.		
3. Conway		

Approximately 349 school district personnel were included in the final sample. Table 2 illustrates the distribution by region and school size.

Table 2: SCHOOL DISTRICT PERSONNEL SAMPLE BY REGION AND SCHOOL SIZE

	Region I (Mountains)			Region II (Delta)			Region III (Plains)			State Wide
	Small	Medium	Large	Small	Medium	Large	Small	Medium	Large	Total
Number	30	35	45	6	39	40	20	33	101	349
Percent of Total	8.6	10.0	12.9	1.7	11.2	11.2	11.5	9.5	28.9	100

Administering the Survey Questionnaire to Personnel in Sample Schools

A letter was written to the sample school districts requesting their participation in the survey. Each school district that agreed to participate was sent survey questionnaires for their selected sample of school personnel with instructions for administering the instrument. The completed survey questionnaires were returned to the consultants.

Scoring and Summarizing the Survey Questionnaires

Arrangements were made with the Southern Arkansas University computer center to score the survey questionnaire and to summarize the data. Data were obtained measuring the mean responses of teachers and administrators separately and together, for the State as a whole, for each school size category, and for each geographical region of the State. An analysis of the data is presented in the following section of this report.

Results of Assessment Studies

The following findings were identified from the studies conducted on the dissemination needs of school district personnel and personnel in the Arkansas Department of Education.

1) The single most important educational information need of school district personnel in Arkansas is information about curriculum development. Other high priority information needs are: (a) information about accountability and minimum competencies; (b) information about program evaluation; (c) information about in-service education; and (d) information about legal and legislative matters.

2) The single most frequently used source for obtaining educational information by school district personnel is colleagues. School libraries and professional associations are other high-ranking sources for providing information.

3) School district personnel feel that a service providing them a list of persons who have used educational programs and/or a packet of information on educational practices and programs would be most helpful. Other helpful services, as viewed by the school personnel, are: (a) a referral list of consultants or personnel experienced in a subject matter area; (b) available information packages at conferences, workshops, et cetera; and (c) a newsletter of dissemination activities going on in Arkansas.

4) Audiovisual materials were rated as the most helpful format for disseminating information by school district personnel. Other high-ranking formats included books, journals and letters, curriculum guides, descriptions of successful programs and training materials.

5) School district personnel in Arkansas have very limited access to informational resources. The primary informational resources available are professional books, professional journals, and access to interlibrary loans.

6) School district personnel feel a need to have available such informational resources as loan provilege from libraries in higher education institutions, a film resource center, and the ERIC collection.

7) In choosing and implementing a new educational program, school district personnel feel a need for such services as (a) help from a school person who has worked in the program; (b) opportunity to visit the program; and (c) an opportunity to attend workshops where the program is explained.

8) The educational information needs of school district personnel vary slightly from one geographical region to another in the State, but not to any significant degree. The basic primary needs are usually prevalent in every geographical region.

9) The educational information needs of school district personnel vary slightly according to the size of the school district, but not to any significant degree. The basic primary needs are common on a statewide basis.

10) State Education Agency (SEA) personnel indicate that dissemination activities are required or implied by goals and objectives of their respective areas.

11) The single most important educational information need of Arkansas SEA personnel is information about legal and legislative matters. Other high priority information needs are: (a) information about effective programs; (b) information about in-service education programs; (c) information about program evaluation; and (d) information about accountability and minimum competencies.

12) SEA personnel are quite knowledgeable about educational programs and information within their specific areas of responsibility, but are less knowledgeable about programs within their administrative division, and have little knowledge about programs in other divisions within the Department of Education. There is a need for more adequate communication within the SEA.

13) There is a need to improve the dissemination activities of the SEA. The greatest need seems to be in such activities as developing and sending newsletters, developing and distributing curriculum guides, developing and distributing instructional packages, assembling and disseminating bibliographies, and assembling and distributing information packages.

14) There is a need to improve the materials used in disseminating educational information by the SEA. The greatest needs seem to be in improving report forms, conference and workshop materials, presentation materials, information packages, and handbooks.

15) Since the target audiences for reviewing dissemination materials from the SEA are superintendents, teachers, principals, advisory councils, and the public, dissemination activities and materials need to be tailored for these groups.

As a result of the NIE Special Purpose dissemination grant, a Capacity Building proposal was submitted to NIE and subsequently funded. A Resource Center has been installed to provide educational information and materials to the local education agencies in the State. The project provides opportunity to train existing personnel in the SEA to become change agents for the purpose of bringing about educational improvement. These people will be available to be trainers of other potential process consultants in the SEA and LEA, thus multiplying the dissemination capability of the system.

The project also provides opportunity for the coordination of all dissemination activities within the SEA. Through correlation activities, the personnel will have a much greater awareness of existing information and services available to bring about educational improvement and should decrease the duplication of efforts.

Opportunity is also provided by the project for the SEA to coordinate efforts with the Arkansas State Library, the Arkansas State Council on Economic Education, and others. The pooling of resources and coordination of efforts of various public agencies will result in a more comprehensive coverage and better utilization of funds and materials.

The use of incentives for pilot districts, as proposed in the project, will help provide a way to ensure greater use of the available information and services by the LEA's.